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ABSTRACT

There are many difficulties in categorical programs for students with special needs as they are currently implemented. The technique of 20/20 Analysis is a simple and effective method of developing an integrative service delivery system in which students who show the least and most progress on significant outcome variables receive intensive study and instruction. The analysis consists of a two-phased process. In the initial phase, teachers and administrators select an area of learning and assess the achievement of students within that area using existing data. Achievement levels for students below the 20th percentile, or above the 80th, are identified as "low 20" or "high 20" groups for whom curriculum adaptation or intensive instruction are needed. This analysis provides a systematic outcome-based approach to meeting special needs of students. It allows for a reliable and cost-effective way to identify service needs as it undoes the current practice of labeling children. Focusing on the individual needs of students and promoting collaboration among professionals are benefits of 20/20 Analysis. Research results from elementary schools in a large urban district show that 79% of those children labeled as special education students and almost all in Chapter 1 program were in the "low 20." These results are predictive of the usefulness of 20/20 analysis. Three related publications are listed. (SLD)

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SS Spotlight on Student Success

A digest of research from the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success No. 101

Fostering Resilience and Learning Success in Schools: 20/20 Analysis

by
Maynard Reynolds

Current categorical programs designed to serve students with special needs are ineffective and cause a number of problems. In many schools 50% or more of all students are placed in special categorical programs at some point between grades K and 12. The time and cost involved in such categorical evaluations and placements is staggering. Major trends indicating a need for reform include: evaluation systems often place students in inappropriate programs; discrepancies exist in racial distribution within categorical programs; there is resentment and concern about child labeling; proactive efforts in preventing learning and behavior problems are lacking; federal, state, and local regulatory processes are excessive; a lack of coordination exists among different service programs; and ineffective use is made of psychologists and other service specialists.

What Is 20/20 Analysis?

20/20 Analysis is a simple and efficient method of developing an integrative service delivery system in which students who show the least and most progress on significant outcome variables receive intensive study and instruction. The goal of the program is to aid in identifying students most in need of special help. It assesses students on important outcomes of education, such as general reading ability, arithmetic, and/or classroom behavior. By identifying students in the lowest 20th and highest 20th percentiles, 20/20 Analysis pinpoints those students for whom the existing instructional program is least effective so that it can be adapted to suit their individual needs.

How Does It Work?

20/20 Analysis consists of a two-phase process. In the initial phase, administrators and teachers select an area of learning—such as reading or math—and assess students' achievement levels within that area. Using existing data from standardized achievement tests, and/or curriculum-based assessment and teacher evaluations, the school staff then examine grade-wide and schoolwide achievement levels to identify students who require "special" interventions. Achievement levels for individual students below the 20th percentile or above the 80th percentile are identified as "low 20" or "high 20" groups for whom curriculum adaptation and/or intensive instruction are needed. By focusing on both the lowest and highest ends of the achievement continuum, 20/20 Analysis provides a broad, systematic, outcome-based approach to serving students with special needs. It is designed as an alternative to the current practice of identifying or "certifying" students for the existing narrowly framed (and mostly disjointed) categorical programs; which tend to result in child labeling and program segregation.

Phase two identifies and analyzes alternative ways to modify curriculum and practice to enhance the learning needs of individual students in the high and low 20 groups. Emphasis at this stage centers on programmatic implementation concerns that address the needs of the individual students and the development of individual program plans. The process calls for committees of teachers, parents, and related service providers to develop and evaluate collaborative and coordinated services that can be provided to enhance learning opportunities for each student who requires a special intervention.

What Advantages Does 20/20 Analysis Offer?

20/20 Analysis directly addresses many of the current problems in the delivery of special or categorical programs by:

- Providing a reliable, accountable, and cost-effective process for identifying instructional and related service needs of the students in a given school/district. The

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current practice for identification and classification of students for special programs has become an increasingly costly venture. Program categories are ill-defined, and classification is unreliable. The 20/20 procedure seeks to appropriately adapt school programs according to simple yet comprehensive and systematic procedures. This allows schools to quickly identify which students need extra support, without having to use costly and stigmatizing identification and classification methods in order to gain access to services. Schools can then apply the money they would have spent on testing and categorization toward much-needed services.

- Attempting to undo the common practice of labeling children (as mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, etc.). The current classification and labeling system not only fails to provide any specific and practical interventions that can be used to meet the needs of the individual student, but is likely to generate resistance from parents and have deeply stigmatic effects on children. When using 20/20 Analysis procedures, the first step in diagnosis is not labeling but direct assessment of the learning needs and progress.

- Focusing on individual needs of students, especially those whose learning progress is marginal. This adds important dimensions of student achievement in ways that are instructionally relevant.

- Seeking to bring about collaborative efforts among professionals with specialized expertise who sometimes operate in disjointed and competitive ways, and encouraging school- and district-wide coordination of programs.

- Concentrating on the important outcomes or goals of education and the basic components of student learning, such as reading, quantitative thinking, and classroom behavior. In 20/20 Analysis, learning difficulties are indicators of intervention needs rather than student deficits. Greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of special services can be accomplished through early detection, description of learning needs, and interventions.

Overall, 20/20 Analysis provides schools with the information necessary for building service systems that encompass a full range of coordinated approaches to meet the individual needs of all children, including and especially those at the margins of the achievement continuum, and to avoid fragmentation of services. Thus, 20/20 Analysis is intended to facilitate schoolwide implementation efforts in ways that involve all categorical programs.

How Effective Is 20/20 Analysis?

20/20 analyses are being carried out in selected schools in several major cities. Feedback from these schools has been strongly supportive and has indicated that the analysis is a feasible process and an accurate indicator of which students require greater-than-usual instruction and related services. Furthermore, the school staffs see this as a useful process for fostering a noncategorical approach to achieving targeted learning outcomes for individual students.

Findings from a study conducted in elementary schools in one of the nation's largest school districts produced the following results: (a) 79% of children labeled special education students, and almost all children labeled Chapter 1 students, were included in the group whose achievement level was within the bottom 20th percentile; (b) most of the lowest performing students in reading were not receiving intensive instructional help of any kind; (c) students needing extra instruction in English were overrepresented in lower 20th percentile groups (these students were not succeeding in reading and were judged to be in need of a strong language development program); (d) in most cases, special education teachers had a full-time aide and worked with a maximum of 6 pupils at a time—but in the earliest grades, dozens of students were not receiving the help they needed; (e) only a small percentage of high-achieving top 20th percentile students were receiving differentiated instruction—most high performers were overlooked; and (f) school attendance was a major problem for students whose reading achievement was in the low 20th percentile.

These results are positive predictors of the usefulness of 20/20 Analysis as an innovative diagnostic/planning strategy. Through repeated applications over time, the 20/20 plan has been proven as an alternate procedure that can significantly improve schools' capacity to redirect their resources toward implementing "what works" to improve instruction and learning for students.

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RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Reynolds, M. C., Zetlin, A. G., & Wang, M. C. (1993). 20/20 Analysis: Taking a close look at the margins. Exceptional Children, 59(4), 294-300.

Reynolds, M. C., & Zetlin, A. G. (1993). A manual for 20/20 Analysis: A tool for instructional planning. Philadelphia: Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education.

Zetlin, A. G., Campbell, B., Lujan, M., & Lujan, R. (Spring 1994). Schools and families working together for children. Equity and Choice, 10(3), 10-15.

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